

# Mammograms and Breast Cancer



Department of Health and Human Services  
Food and Drug Administration  
5600 Fishers Lane, (HFI-40)  
Rockville, MD 20857

March 2000  
(FDA)00-4269

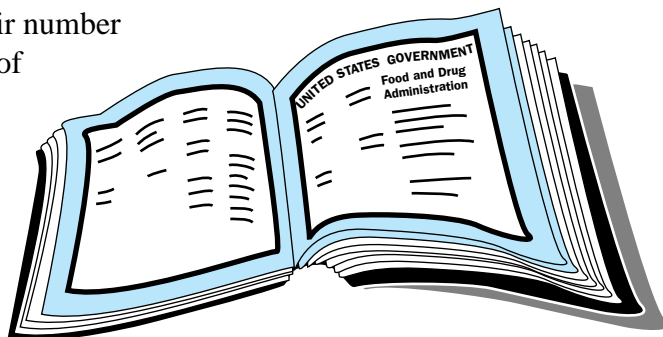
**FDA** U.S. Food and Drug Administration

## Do You Have More Questions?

FDA may have an office near you. Look for their number in the blue pages of the phone book.

You can also contact FDA through its toll-free number, 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332).

Or, on the World Wide Web at [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov).



## What Is A Mammogram?

A mammogram is a special kind of x-ray of the breasts. Mammograms are used to help find breast cancer early, when it can still be cured.

Mammograms are recommended for women over 40 years old even if they have no signs of breast cancer.



○ Radiation Therapy—  
Radiation from special  
equipment is aimed at the  
tumor to kill cancer cells and  
shrink the tumor.

○ Treatment with one or more  
drugs.

Radiation and drug treatment  
are often given after surgery.



## Why Are Mammograms Important?

A mammogram can save your  
life. Mammograms can show  
tumors that may be cancer long  
before they can be felt. Treating  
tumors when they are still small  
makes curing cancer easier.

You usually need to go to a  
special clinic to get a  
mammogram. FDA inspects  
and certifies all places in the  
United States where  
mammograms are done.

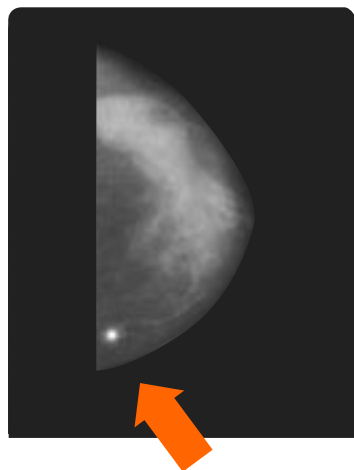
Look for the FDA certificate at  
the clinic where you go for your  
mammogram. FDA certification  
means the clinic's equipment  
and staff meet federal standards  
and that your mammogram will  
be safe and of high quality.

## What If My Mammogram Shows A Problem?

Mammograms can show if the inside of the breast looks normal. But a mammogram can't show for sure whether you have breast cancer.

If you have a mammogram that doesn't look normal, your doctor will probably suggest a biopsy—a tissue sample of the breast. A biopsy is minor surgery. The breast tissue from a biopsy is tested in a laboratory to see if it's cancerous.

Remember, just because a problem area shows up on your



mammogram that doesn't mean you have cancer. Cancer can only be diagnosed by a lab test on tissue from your breast.

## How To Examine Your Breasts

1) Look at your breasts in a mirror to see if there is anything you haven't noticed before such as:

- discharge from the nipples
- change in how the nipple looks
- change in how the skin looks.

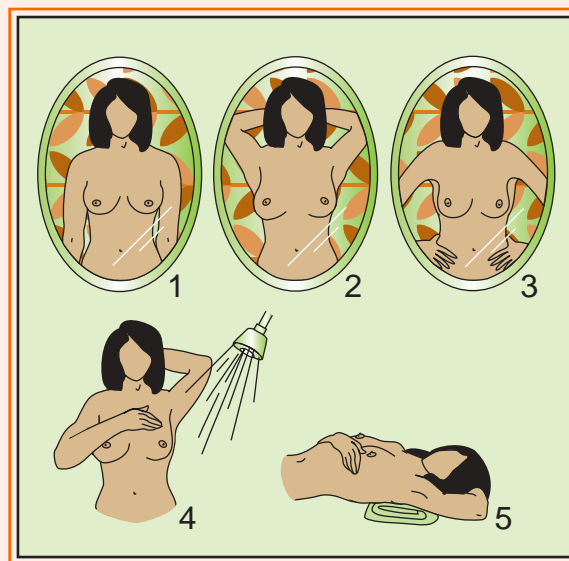
2) Still looking in the mirror, join your hands behind your head and press them gently against the back of your neck. Are there any changes from last month in how your breasts look?

3) Still looking in the mirror, press your hands on your hips. Bow slightly forward, pulling your shoulders and elbows forward.

Look for changes since last month in how your breasts look.

4) When you're in the shower and your skin is soapy, do this exam. Raise your left arm. Using 3 or 4 fingers of your right hand, begin at the outer edge of your breast. Press your fingers firmly into your breast and slowly move your hand in circles until you reach the nipple. Make sure you examine the entire breast. In the same way, examine the area between the breast and armpit, and then the armpit itself. Do you feel any lump under the skin? Gently squeeze the nipple. Is there any discharge? Do the same thing with your right arm raised and your left hand examining your right breast.

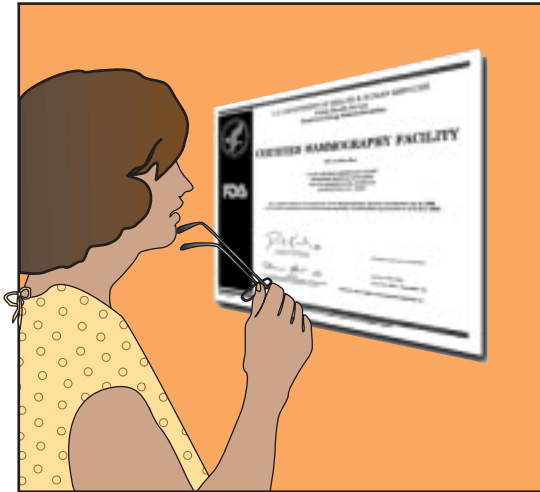
5) Get out of the shower, dry off, and lie down on your back. Repeat the same exam as in #4.



The Food and Drug Administration  
(FDA) is part of the United States  
Government. It is one of FDA's jobs to  
inspect and certify facilities  
that do mammograms.

## What About Younger Women?

Mammograms are also recommended for younger women who have symptoms of breast cancer or who have a high risk of getting breast cancer.



## How To Find A Clinic

To find out what mammography clinics in your area are certified by FDA, call 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237) or a local chapter of the American Cancer Society listed in your phone book. If you are hearing impaired, you can call 1-800-332-8615 TTY.



If you have computer access to the World Wide Web, you can find a list of FDA-certified facilities on [www.fda.gov/cdrh/mammography.certified.html](http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/mammography.certified.html).

## Who Gets Breast Cancer?

Any woman can get breast cancer. Each year, about 185,000 women in the United States get breast cancer and about 44,000 die from it.

You may be more likely to get breast cancer if you:

- Have a mother or sister who had breast cancer.
- Have inherited certain genes. These genes are more common in people with Jewish ancestors from Eastern Europe.
- Had your first menstrual period before you were 12.

- Stopped having periods after you were 50.
- Never had children or had your first child when you were over 30.
- Have had radiation treatments to your chest area.

Also, the older you are, the more likely you are to get breast cancer. Remember, though, that one out of four women who get breast cancer don't have any of these risks.

## How Breast Cancer Is Treated

There are a number of treatments for breast cancer. The treatment depends on the type of tumor, whether the cancer has spread, and other facts you and your doctor will discuss. Some treatments are:

- Lumpectomy—Surgery that removes the lump or tumor and a small amount of breast tissue around it, leaving the rest of the breast. A lumpectomy is usually the preferred treatment when cancer hasn't spread outside the breast.

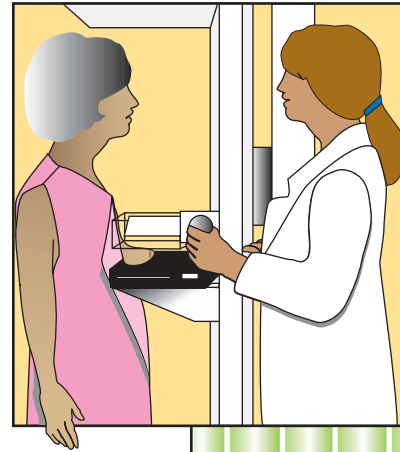
- Total Mastectomy—Surgery that removes the entire breast and usually the adjoining lymph nodes. This may be necessary when there is more than one cancer in the breast, or when a single cancer is large when compared to the breast. Breast reconstruction is usually available to women who have had a breast removed. If you have a breast removed, you may want to talk with your doctor about various types of surgical breast reconstruction and decide if reconstruction is right for you.

## Examinations Are Important

Three kinds of exams can help detect breast cancer:

- Mammography
- Doctor's exam
- Self-exam

It's important to have a doctor examine your breasts at least once a year. It's also important to examine your breasts



yourself once a month. Some women find it's easiest to do this at the same time each month, like when your menstrual period ends.

